

Chicago Department of Buildings

2013 Budget Statement to City Council
Committee on Budget and Government Operations

October 19, 2012

Michael Merchant, Commissioner

Good Afternoon Chairman Austin, Committee on Budget and Government Operations members and all members of City Council present today.

I am very happy to be here today to discuss the 2013 budget request for the Department of Buildings (DOB). This year, we are taking many steps to improve service, streamline processes and provide innovative approaches to managing this department.

Our goal continues to be maintaining our core services to citizens and positively impacting public safety. Thanks to efficiencies gained by adopting technologies and cost savings derived from transferring projects in-house, we continue our mission while maintaining the integrity of our work.

We are pleased to report that through September, 2012, DOB revenues were \$32,044,495.64, an increase of \$4,966,164.13, which is 18% more than 2011.

We are also dedicated to significantly improving customer convenience and decreasing the time to permit. This year we adopted the Electronic Plan Review System and are utilizing the Certified Corrections Program. In addition, we have focused on working with the Police Department to keep our streets safe, by securing, or, when necessary, demolishing vacant buildings that have been identified as havens for gangs and criminal activity.

Let me share with you more details about these and some of our other specific accomplishments.

Key Accomplishments in 2012

Expanding Electronic Plan Review

In July 2012, DOB fully implemented an Electronic Plan Review system (E-Plan) that we launched at the beginning of this year. E-Plan facilitates multiple discipline review and tracking of projects through every step of the review process. This system allows design professionals to submit plans electronically 24/7 from the convenience of their offices, and allows multiple DOB plan reviewers to examine and approve plans simultaneously. Architects no longer have to schedule in-person meetings at City Hall to submit or pick up plans and corrections.

This program has been implemented, in no small measure, through the willing participation and cooperation of users and members of the design community, along with the hard work of DOB staff.

As of today, DOB has issued more than 800 permits utilizing the E-Plan and there are less than a half dozen paper-based projects remaining under DOB review.

Our success has already been noticed, as we have been contacted regarding E-Plan by other major municipalities, including New York City, Los Angeles, Boston and Dallas.

E-Plan has also provided us with the opportunity to better coordinate the overall efforts of the various other departments that are involved in the building permit process, including DHED, CPDH, MOPD and CDOT.

Mandatory Certified Corrections Program

DOB now mandates use of the Certified Corrections Program. This program allows the department to issue permits for plans that require minor corrections to comply with the municipal code, as long as the architect is willing to certify that the corrections have been made. A DOB inspector then checks the corrections in the field to verify that construction is being done to code. This program decreases the number of DOB staff reviews and therefore the time to permit for the customer.

50% Up Front Fee

Historically, hundreds of projects were reviewed by our examiners without permits being issued or fees collected, costing us valuable time and resources. Equally, if not more important, these shell projects clogged up the review and permit queue.

In 2012, the Department began to collect 50 percent of the permit fee “up front,” or at the time the plans are submitted, instead of waiting to collect the entire fee when the permit is issued. This initiative reduced the number of speculative permit applications submitted.

Enforcement of Vacant Properties

Demolitions

In July, Mayor Emanuel announced a new initiative in which DOB worked closely with the Chicago Police Department to identify, secure and in some cases demolish vacant buildings to stop gangs from using the buildings as gathering places and centers for illegal activity.

To date, DOB has demolished 171 buildings to remove these hubs of violence from our communities. Overall this year, as part of our ongoing work to demolish dangerous and hazardous buildings in the city, DOB has demolished an additional 443 buildings, for a total of 614 buildings demolished this year. DOB estimates that we will board up and secure 1,100 properties and, overall, demolish more than 730 dangerous and hazardous buildings (including

garages) in 2012. This represents a 58% increase over the 463 buildings DOB demolished in 2011.

As of October 1, 2012, the DOB Demolition unit inspections have led to 1,251 cases on the demolition call in Cook County Circuit Court. To date this year, 7,849 vacant buildings have been registered as required under the vacant building ordinance.

Strategic Task Force (STF)/Gang and Drug House Enforcement

The Department of Buildings is working closely with the Chicago Police Department and the Department of Law to enforce the Gang and Drug House ordinance. This program helps keep neighborhoods safe by holding building owners responsible for the activities inside their buildings. It also encourages landlords to properly screen all new tenants and to take actions against those that are destroying communities or risk significant fines and other actions.

As of October 1, 2012, the DOB Strategic Task Force had conducted approximately 700 inspections of buildings referred to DOB by CPD. Working with CPD, STF has closed down 29 problem businesses that were determined to have dangerous and hazardous conditions. STF will continue to assist the CPD in 2013.

Inspection Efficiencies

The Department of Buildings continues to examine ways to reduce the number of individual DOB staff visits to sites, thus offering more efficiency to the City, while continuing to assure public safety and enforce the City's Code.

Inspections

Building inspections continue to be a core responsibility of our department. Our team of inspectors will complete an estimated 252,000 inspections in 2012, which include 52,000 complaints that were called into 311.

We handle a wide variety of inspections at DOB. We inspect restaurants and other small businesses to make sure they are up to municipal code. We inspect signs to assure residents are safe walking in the public way under a large sign and carnival rides in the summer to make sure everyone is having "safe" fun. We do annual inspections on a wide range of devices and buildings in the City and visit sites throughout Chicago when a complaint comes into 311 stating local homes or businesses may not be in compliance with the municipal code.

Innovation Loan Program/Buildings Automated Inspection Scheduling System

The Department has received funding from the Innovation Loan Fund to create a new, electronic automated inspection scheduling system. Our current system is antiquated, as it is largely manual and paper-based. Ideally, the new system could be utilized by other City departments as well, to eventually modernize their appointment systems. We are currently reviewing final proposals

from three vendors being considered to implement this new system. We estimate the new scheduling system will be implemented in or by the second quarter of 2013.

Signage/Billboards

Electrical inspectors from the Department inspect the approximately 37,000 permitted signs every other year, with approximately 18,500 signs inspected annually. To date, 1,011 signs have been cited for violations, which may include damaged or neglected electrical or structural components or a lack of a proper permit. This number includes the 766 signs cited for violations during a sign blitz that DOB began in March, 2012. This blitz focused primarily on signs larger than 10' x 10' in size throughout Chicago.

As part of a collaborative effort with other City departments, DOB not only continues to address the overall issue of unpermitted signage, but our staff also continues to ensure compliance with the updated sign provisions of the municipal code. DOB inspectors now attend the Administrative Hearings to present their findings on the re-inspections of the illegal signage.

Going forward, DOB will continue to work with the law department and Aldermanic Sign Task Force to amend and update the municipal code that governs signs and billboards.

Individual Programs

There are two other programs I would like to mention.

Life Safety Evaluations

The first is the Life Safety Evaluation program. To date, DOB had approved the LSE reports for 487 buildings, or approximately 68% of the 719 buildings in the Life Safety Evaluation program. This program requires all pre-1975 high rises in Chicago be fully sprinklered or implement an adequate number of fire safety upgrades in their buildings, verified through a Life Safety Evaluation plan.

These reports, approved by the Buildings and Fire Departments, are the precursor to the LSE inspection. Thirty six buildings have now passed the LSE inspection, an increase of more than 1,000% since January of this year, when three buildings had passed this inspection.

One hundred and eighty four of the buildings that have not had their reports approved have either gone to an LSE training class or had a meeting with the LSE committee to receive assistance in revising their reports to obtain a passing score.

The deadline for compliance is January 1, 2015.

Annual Inspection Certification (AIC) Program for Elevators and Other Devices

The second program, the Annual Inspection Certification (AIC) program for elevators, was developed two years ago, in cooperation with building owners. The program requires that buildings in Chicago's Central Business District hire a qualified third party inspector to perform the annual inspection of elevator systems and then report the results electronically to DOB in lieu of an annual inspection conducted by a DOB elevator inspector.

As of August 31, 2012, 1,121 buildings, or 87% of the buildings with conveyance devices in the CBD, had 7,789 devices in AIC the program.

In 2012, DOB focused on enhancing the AIC user website and pursuing enforcement action against buildings in the CBD that have not yet participated in the program.

The program is currently being expanded beyond the CBD to include large institutions such as universities, hospitals, and sports arenas.

Green Permit Program

The Department of Buildings continues to maintain Chicago's reputation a leader in environmental design and construction by offering the Green Permit Program. Created in 2004, this program offers financial incentives and expedited service for developers who want to build green buildings. In 2005, we issued 19 permits. In 2012, we will issue more than 115 green permits.

Moving Forward

Chairman Austin and members of the City Council, during 2012, the Department of Buildings has taken many steps to make our department more efficient and more transparent. In the next year, we plan to continue our efforts to complete more inspections and provide better services to residents. We look forward to our continued collaborative partnerships with Aldermen, residents, businesses, the construction industry and our sister-departments to ensure that Chicago buildings remain safe.

Department of Buildings

2013 Budget Hearing

MBE/WBE Data

Period: 1/1 /2012 – 8/31/2012

Total Purchases: \$9,069,549.53

	MBE	WBE	Total MBE/WBE Purchases
Asian	\$398,007.51 (15%)	\$92,680.35 (100%)	490,687.86
African-American	\$ 2,325,068.83(84%)	\$0 (0%)	2,325.068.83
Hispanic	\$32,999.00 (1%)	\$0 (0%)	32,999
Total Spending	\$2,756,070.34 (30%)	\$92,680.35 (1%)	\$2,848,755.69(31%)

Staffing Data

Department Ethnicity and Gender				
	Male	Female	Total	%
Asian	8	3	11	4
Black	48	29	77	30
Hispanic	34	9	43	17
Indian	2	0	2	1
White	115	12	127	49
Total	207	53	260	
	80%	20%		100

New Hires Ethnicity and Gender				
	Male	Female	Total	%
Asian	0	0	0	
Black	1	0	1	25
Hispanic	1	0	1	25
White	0	2	2	50
Total	2	2	4	
	50%	50%		100%

Department Managers Ethnicity and Gender				
	Male	Female	Total	%
Asian	1	1	2	25
Black	2	1	3	38
Hispanic	0	0	0	0
White	2	0	2	25
Indian	1	0	1	12
Total	6	2	8	
	75%	25%		100

Interns

School	Gender	Race
Art Institute of Chicago	Female	White
Cooley Law	Female	White
Cooley Law	Female	White
Cooley Law	Female	White
DePaul University	Female	White
DePaul University	Female	White
DePaul University	Male	Black
Illinois Institute of Technology	Male	White
Illinois Institute of Technology	Female	Asian
Indiana University	Male	Asian

Department of Buildings

2013 Budget Hearing

Intrax Chicago English School	Male	Hispanic
Intrax Chicago English School	Male	Hispanic
Kent College of Law	Male	White
Kent College of Law	Female	Asian
Lake Forest College	Female	Hispanic
Lawrence University	Male	White
Lewis University	Female	Black
University of Miami, Florida	Female	Asian
Roosevelt University	Female	White
University of Cincinnati	Female	White
University of Illinois Urbana	Male	Black
University of Illinois Chicago	Male	White
University of Illinois Chicago	Male	White
University of Illinois Chicago	Female	White
University of Illinois Chicago	Female	White
University of Illinois Chicago	Male	Black
University of Illinois Chicago	Female	Hispanic
Wabash University	Male	Hispanic
Washington University	Male	Black
Wesley College	Female	White
Western Michigan University	Male	White

